

Mercy in community: reconciliation, dialogue, forgiving debts

To look with you more deeply into the theme of mercy in community, I would like to start with a passage from the Sermon on the Mount, in chapter 5 of St. Matthew:

“So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.” (Mt 5:23-24)

The disturbed offering

It is a gospel passage that seems to me to correspond well to our life and vocation. Jesus addresses someone who presents his offering at the altar. In Greek “to present an offering” literally could be translated: “to bring forward a gift.” It implies, then, an idea of a free, gratuitous gesture. The offering we bring to the altar is a gift we want to make to God. We note that the intention of the offerer is mainly to offer something *on* the altar (*epi to thysiasterion*). But then it is like Jesus stopped him, and tells him to leave the offering *before* the altar (*emprosthen tou thysiasteriou*).

The gesture of presenting one’s own gift at the altar of God is the basic meaning of the monastic vocation. It is the sense of every baptized person’s vocation, but monks have the vocation of focusing on this gesture, that is, of living their baptism as an offering of self to the Lord, the offering that we are all always called to express and renew in celebrating the Eucharist. See, it is a bit like Jesus, in this passage of the Sermon on the Mount, is looking at a monk, a nun, who is making Profession. It is not by chance that the rite of Profession calls for signing the document of the vows on the altar, and leaving it on the altar during the Eucharistic prayer. Jesus looks at this monk who freely puts his offering on the altar and tells him: Stop for a moment! Before putting your offering on the altar, I invite you to reflect, to think – literally to “remember”. And to remember what? Perhaps the rite, or the ceremony? Perhaps God or the angels? No! Christ wants us to remember our brother, our sister.

One was there all pious and full of good religious sentiments, and perhaps had freed his thoughts from every distraction to think of God alone, of the sacred offering, of religion, and then Jesus “ruins the ceremony”, disturbs the rite, and asks us almost to “distract ourselves”, to think of something other than God. He asks us to remember our brother, and as if that were not enough to disturb our recollection, he asks us to think of the brother who “has something against” us, who is our adversary, or whose adversary we are. We know quite well that nothing disturbs our inner peace and our prayer more than

thinking of the people with whom we have relationship problems. And yet, Christ asks us not to ban that thought, but to remember precisely those people, and further he asks this of us as a condition for praying well, for offering our life well and truly to God.

The voice of the blood of Abel

We must hear in this invitation of Jesus, to remember the brother with whom we do not get along, the echo of a very long story, which takes us all the way back to Cain and Abel. For here Jesus is like God who “troubles” the conscience of Cain by asking him: “Where is Abel, your brother?” (Gen 4:9). Let’s not forget that Cain’s animosity toward Abel arose precisely on account of the offerings presented to God (cf. Gen 4:3-5). God reminds Cain that the brother whom we do not love cannot be forgotten in God’s eyes. And Abel did not only “have something against Cain”: “the voice of his blood” cried out to God from the ground (cf. Gen 4:10). The blood of Abel, the life of Abel, “had something against” Cain, accused Cain, and God hears this cry, this lament, this accusation from the innocent brother regarding the brother who has done him wrong.

So, I think that we should understand that also in this Gospel passage that we are meditating on, what our brother has against us is an accusation that makes us guilty, or at least responsible. We must be willing to confront ourselves with this accusation. Like the blood of Abel, God hears the accusation that our brother’s heart has against us, and he asks us to be sensitive too to this accusation, to listen to it, to resolve it, before putting our offering on the altar.

In the Psalms too we find this request of God, that we not be willing to offer sacrifices to Him, rebuking our relationship with our brothers and sisters. For example in Psalm 49:

“You give your mouth free rein for evil,
and your tongue frames deceit.
You sit and speak against your kin;
you slander your own mother’s child.
These things you have done and I have been silent;
you thought that I was one just like yourself.
But now I rebuke you, and lay the charge before you. (...)
Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honour me;
to those who go the right way
I will show the salvation of God.” (Ps 50:19-23)

In summary, God asks us always to remember our neighbor, not to go to Him if we forget our brothers and sisters. The Psalms, the Prophets, and the whole New Testament are a continuous invitation to this “remembering” our brother. The patriarchs lived this out as well. In the presence of God who appears to him at Mamre, Abraham is totally taken with the thought of the inhabitants of Sodom, though such sinners, and does everything he can to obtain God’s mercy (cf. Gen 18:23-32). And what is the first word of Moses in the Bible? It is what he says to a Hebrew who is striking another Hebrew:

“Why are you striking your brother?” (Ex 2:13). The whole vocation of Moses basically starts here, with this question, with this invitation to remember my brother and to be aware of what is happening between him and me.

Moses’ first word, like God’s first word to Cain (gen 4:6-9), or Jesus’ first word to St. Paul – “Why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:4) –, is a dramatic question that reminds us of the problem of our relationship with our brothers. To accept this question is a judgment that brings to light all the resistance to love that is in us. This question is a wound. If we accept it, it can be a wound of repentance that generates a compassion for all, which is not ours, which is a grace, a true miracle. It is as if God had come to ask our heart from us, to ask for it and take it, to give it to our wounded brother, as God gives his to us.

Reconciliation is part of the offering

So Jesus invites us to insert into the act of our offering to God the thought, the remembrance of our fraternal relations. And so we cannot live the relationship with God in truth if the discord with our brother is not resolved in us.

Let’s note that this remembering our brother in discord, and leaving to be reconciled with him, in a certain sense is not an act that happens outside the offering. In fact, asks us to leave the offering there before the altar while we go to be reconciled with our brother. Thus it is as if going to be reconciled were part of the gift. It’s like the gift is missing something which the offerer must still go get to add it to the offering so that the offering can truly be whole and pleasing to God.

In Christian life, and in particular in monastic life, one cannot dissociate the offering to God and fraternal reconciliation. In Christ it is no longer possible to dissociate the relationship with God and the relationship with the neighbor. In the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 exactly is the essential point: the priest and the Levite do not touch the wounded man because that would render impure the offering they had made or were going to make in the Temple of Jerusalem; that would make them incapable of the cult that is their profession, and therefore the most important thing in life. In this they do not realize they are contradicting the heart of the Law, which the scholar who questions Jesus brings to light by referring to some passages of the Old Testament: “You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, with your whole strength, and with your whole mind, and your neighbor as yourself” (Lk 10:27; cf. Deut 6:5; Jos 22:5; Lev 19:18).

Basically, the great Christian revolution and newness is not so much in the worship of God, but in the necessity of not dissociating the worship of God from charity toward man. For the heart of Christianity is the person of Jesus Christ, true God and true man. If we create this dissociation, our vocation becomes an aberration. The dissociation between the offering to God and fraternal reconciliation divides us not only from God, but divides us interiorly, inhibits us from being unified men and women, that is,

“monks.” To be clear: this is true in both senses, as much in dedicating ourselves wholly to the worship of God while forgetting our brothers, as in dedicating ourselves wholly to our brothers while forgetting the love of God, prayer.

To call brothers and sisters, then, to reconciliation, the first step is to help them become aware again of the fact that one cannot offer one’s life to God, as every nun or monk would want to do, without dedicating oneself effectively to fraternal relationships. Every day, really, we are called to “leave our offering before the altar” to go to “be reconciled with our brother”, and only in this way is our offering, our whole offered life, placed on the altar, that is, the way to make our offering truly accepted, received, sanctified by God and for God. If we want “truly to seek God”, as St. Benedict asks of the novices (cf. RB 58:7), we must not forget truly to seek our brother, sister, from whom we are divided or distant.

Responsible for the brother’s heart

For this reason St. Benedict helps us throughout the Rule to remember the brother who has something against us. It is an awareness, a sensitivity, a preoccupation that we must cultivate in ourselves and in the community. Basically, this means feeling responsible for the brother’s feelings, for his heart, for his joy and sadness. Several times the Rule asks for this responsibility for each other’s feelings. That is where the process of reconciliation begins. It is like remorse, contrition, which makes us uneasy before God, and therefore we understand that something must happen with the irritated brother, that it is not enough to let the problem pass. There is a process that must occur between the brother and me, and if I am there, and the brother is there too, it will be an opportunity to advance on the path of offering our life to God. Basically, this means always cultivating the attitude of the first Christian community in the Cenacle of Jerusalem. The united prayer (Acts 1:14) and being all together (Acts 2:1) are the dimension of the true and pleasing offering to God that receives the grace of the Holy Spirit. What is requested of a man, of a community, is to present to God this concord, this unity, to which the Spirit gives fulfilment with the gift to the Church of trinitarian Communion.

An anonymous apothegm says: “Give your soul and receive the spirit, that is the Holy Spirit” (Thematic Series, Compunction, n. 54).

Basically this is the whole ascetic labor that is asked of us continually : to offer God our soul, our *psyché*, our feelings, our judgments, our life, our whole autonomous I, so often wrapped back on itself, to receive our spirit (*pneuma*), the Spirit of God who comes to vivify in charity all that we are and experience. This is the true worship, the true sacrifice, the true offering in which God delights, and he delights in it by instilling in it the fire for his Paraclete Spirit.

As I was saying, Jesus interrupts the gesture of the offering, asking us to think of the feelings of the hostile brother. This “remembering” the relationship which I have with my brothers and sisters is part of the offering, and it is the beginning of the completed offering. I think of all the times that St. Benedict asks us to be attentive to the feelings of

the brothers, like when he asks the cellarer, with urgency, not to sadden anyone (RB 31:6-7, 13-14, 16-19). Or in chapter 71, on mutual obedience, when he asks each one, under the penalty of serious punishment, to prostrate himself before the superiors or elders if one recognizes that their soul is even only slightly irritated or agitated in our regard (RB 71:7-9). Or when he asks the abbot to arrange everything necessary so as not to stir up in the brothers any justified murmuring (RB 41:5). One could give many of examples of this concern that St. Benedict demands of us regarding the heart of our brothers and sisters. He too, then, wants us not to forget in the offering of our life the brother who has something against us.

It is important to begin with this sensitivity to the other, from this non-indifference towards the heart of the other, even if perhaps the other does not have a reason to be irritated. The irritation of a brother is a problem to confront, not to avoid, not even with prayer or piety.

When we think of our community, or visit other communities, we see that it is not rare for brothers and sisters “to have having something against” other brothers and sisters, or against the superiors, or even against themselves. “To be against” is the opposite of “being with” or “being for” Christian communion. It is truly a problem to take seriously. One is not dealing so much with having different opinions, but with a lack of love for the person of the other that deeply wounds a community and the whole Church. It is the hatred that extinguishes charity.

At times it is a matter only of something that the brother rebukes us for, which irritates him in us, for which he accuses us. In this case too it is important to take it seriously, because it means that I can really be responsible for my brother’s negative feelings, for his sadness, for the collapse of his peace.

Dragged before the judge

In any case, Jesus asks of us a labor of reconciliation.

In what does this labor consist? How to encourage it in our community? It is at this point that we must speak of dialogue and the forgiveness of debts.

The Greek term translated in Matthew 5:24 with “reconcile” is the verb *dialasso*, which literally means “exchange with”. This implies putting oneself back in a situation of exchange with the other, and therefore the search for dialogue, for an exchange of words, for listening to each other to rediscover peace in mutual relationship. To look more deeply into this aspect it is useful to meditate on what follows this gospel:

“Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny!” (Mt 5:25-26)

Here the brother who has something against us is defined as “adversary/accuser”, in Greek *antidikos*, which literally means: adversary in justice, he who accuses us of not

being just, of being guilty. Indeed, it is he who brings us up before the judge so that we be condemned to pay our debt up to the last cent. In the light of other passages and parables of the Gospel, we understand that this is a situation in which we will not be treated with mercy, in which our debt will not be condoned, and we will have to pay it off in prison, without freedom, perhaps with forced labor, like slaves.

I recently received a very well-made SPAM, from the Italian prefecture that was declaring me under arrest for fiscal fraud and money laundering. It was written in perfect Italian, in sophisticated legal terms, with the references to the civil and penal codes. Since after opening this message I had to go to Lauds and Mass, I was left restless for a few hours, and I was already imagining the police busting in to arrest me, etc. It's not that I have a dirty conscience on financial and fiscal questions, because you know that I am pretty much destitute. But I was thinking that perhaps the fact that I have sometimes wired from Switzerland or Italy some monetary gifts to monasteries in Africa, Vietnam, Latin America, had been misunderstood as fiscal fraud or laundering. So, for a few hours I felt a little bit the anxiety that the accused feels who risks prison. And I saw that it is not at all pleasant!

See, Jesus too sends us a SPAM to simulate an anxious situation of being accused, and it is as if he told us that deep down our relationship with our brother must pass through this situation, that in the relationship with every brother or sister there is a moment in which one risks being handed over to the judge, and being judged only according to justice, without mercy, and therefore being condemned to prison, condemned to pay the whole debt from one's own pocket, without any reduction.

What to do to avoid ending up before the judge? We are already on our way to the judge. Every life is born and unfolds already directed toward the tribunal of God, where we will be asked to account for everything. Human life is always being on a path with other people who, in one way or another, put our justice under accusation, our justice toward them. We owe something to every person with whom we live, even if he were living on the world's other hemisphere. We are always debtors to each other. We forget it, we pretend that it is not true, that it is not important, but we are always in debt to someone. Every human being that the Lord puts on our path, he makes us responsible for him. Sometimes because he is poorer than we are. Or perhaps because he is lonelier than us, or has less health, or simply because he is a sinner and needs our mercy. The revolution that Christ introduced into human relations is that we have become debtors also toward those indebted to us, because, with Christ having giving us his life, his whole self, we have a capital of divine gratuity that cancels all of our brothers' debts toward us. Mercy is this: that in Christ who died and rose again for us, no one can be in debt to us more than we ourselves are debtors, on account of the infinite treasure of God's grace which we have received without meriting it.

The path of reconciliation

So, what to do? What does Jesus advise us to do?

First of all Jesus reminds us that we are still *on the path* toward the tribunal, toward the final judgment. Life is this path. And on this path we are in the company of our adversary. Perhaps he keeps us close, he has tied our hands so that we cannot run away, but we are on the path. And Jesus tells us something very interesting: this path is an opportunity, it is not yet a place of condemnation, but a space in which we ourselves can still work for our freedom, in which we can still avoid not only prison and the repayment up to the last penny, but the judgment too, the encounter with the judge too. And we can work toward this by taking advantage of this stretch of road that separates us from the tribunal – and so of our whole life until death – to be reconciled with our brother.

This implies something fundamental for understanding reconciliation. *Reconciliation is a path*. It is not something that happens in a moment of good will, or willful goodness. Reconciliation is a process, a path that I take with the brother or sister that accuses me, or whom I accuse. Reconciliation transforms the path to the tribunal of justice into a common search for peace, communion, mutual understanding. We could walk while continuing to accuse each other, or refusing to speak to each other, awaiting only victory over our rival, or fearing only to lose the case. Jesus invites us to make of our life and our relationships a path of reconciliation.

Let's think of the relationships in our communities. How many brothers and sisters walk among themselves or with us only accusing each other, or always going to the superior to accuse the other, or going to his own friends inside or outside the community! How many brothers and sisters walk without talking to each other! They have problems with relationships, they have a heap of motives, well-founded or imaginary, to complain about each other, and they drag this tension on for years, decades, in a silence that is dark, tomb-like, lifeless.

We must perceive, then, that Jesus' invitation is charged with compassion for the sadness and sterility to which we condemn our relationships, our communities, our life, when we do not live the relationship difficulties, humanly inevitable between sinful human beings, as opportunities to walk the path of reconciliation. If he asks this of us it is because this opportunity is offered us, it is possible to choose it, and He himself wants to help us live thus the path of our life and all our relationships. Not only so that society be more peaceful and human, but also so that we all reach our destiny, which is the offering, the gift of our whole life to the Father who gave it to us first of all.

In this light we should read and meditate upon chapter 72 of the Rule, in which arriving "all together to eternal life", led by Christ, is the culmination of a path of reconciliation and communion among brothers and with one's superior.

Unity of thought

The term that the Gospel uses to express the reconciliation that we are called to choose in the path of life is the term *eunoio*, which could be translated with: "to be of good thought", "of good feeling", and in Latin is translated: *consentiens*, "thinking together".

Jesus suggests that on the path we must seek a consensus of feelings, of thoughts. This implies that the path of reconciliation is a path of dialogue, of common search for truth, the truth about ourselves, the truth of our relationships, the truth about everything, and in particular about what is strongest and most solid in that which divides us or makes us dissatisfied with each other.

“What were you arguing about on the way?” (Mk 9:33), Jesus asked his disciples one day, and they got quiet because they were embarrassed to admit that they were discussing “who was the greatest” (9:34) and therefore were not having a dialogue of reconciliation but of division. They were each other’s adversaries who were dragging each other to the judge so that all the others could be condemned to being inferior.

But in order for our common path to be truly a path of dialogue and reconciliation for communion, we need for that to happen which happened to the disciples of Emmaus. I do not know if in their discussions about the fact and events that happened in Jerusalem there might not have been also an element of conflict, of argument, of accusation, if not between themselves, at least toward the other disciples, or, who knows, even toward Jesus who had failed in his mission.

Jesus comes and transforms that sterile path of lament and sadness into a dialogue of communion of sentiment in listening to and meditating upon the Word of God illuminated by the Word of the Father.

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” (Lk 24:32).

These words, which the two speak as if in chorus, in unison, express a successful reconciliation. Or rather a reconciliation that can continue to realize itself throughout life, because they have learned from Jesus the method of the construction path for a common feeling, a common thought, of choices in common. In this phrase of the two disciples there is the summary of Christian dialogue, that which truly builds communion among us, in communities, in the Church, in the world.

Dialogue truly begins when we accept the Word of God in Christ present to speak to us, in Christ who walks with us to speak to us and enlighten us about the Scriptures. When one cultivates the awareness, liturgical, eucharistic, that Christ speaks to us truly by walking with us, the Scriptures, the Gospel, are not only “lessons” that God gives us, but a real “conversation” with Him: “He was speaking with us along the way”. They were not just supposed to listen silently, but could ask questions, make objections, express their feelings, their ideas; indeed, the following verb, *dianoigo*, literally means *to open*: it is the word for the one who opens the door to let guests enter. Thus Jesus’ speaking to explain the Scriptures was an invitation to enter unto Him to dialogue about the Word of God.

It is necessary to live dialogue in this way in community too, starting with the sharing of the Word of God, so that this dialogue be able to involve our whole person, our heart, to

set it on fire, that is, to make it develop a passion for the beauty and truth of Christ, for the truth that God communicates to us by revealing himself.

If this happens, the dialogue leads the brothers, the sisters, not only to have common ideas, or to make common decisions, or to agree upon things and choices, but also and above all to put their hearts in communion: “Was not our heart burning within us?” The two share the communion of an inner experience, of profound feelings, of joy and intensity, provoked by Christ, by the Word of God. So the reconciliation is not superficial only, but produces a real concord, a deep and solid communion of hearts, even if opinions and ideas actually remain different. He who discovers a harmony with his brother in listening to and recognizing Jesus Christ, in prayer and listening to the Word of God, no longer needs to accuse him, to take him before the judge, to go always to the abbot to criticize him to obtain an advantage or a victory over him. When one truly experiences how much the beauty, goodness and truth of Christ sets our heart on fire, one no longer wishes to continue to complain about each other for the usual stupidities, for the power struggles, to obtain sterile, worldly advantages.

When we take each other before the judge, we waste time, life’s time. It is a time in which we do not live truly and we do not let others live. How much time is lost in community, even during the canonical visitations, with accusing each other over questions ultimately of power and individual advantage! We argue, we argue, and then in the end we do not know who was right and who was wrong, also because by accusing the other basically everyone is wrong. If this time and these energies were dedicated to walking together with Christ, to listening to him, to conversing with Him, conversing among ourselves in His presence, there would grow in us the ardent experience of a beauty, of a taste of life, of communal relationships, of our vocation, which would make everything beautiful, even the limits and defects of our brothers, of our sisters, of our superiors.

Forgiving the paltry debt of a brother

If our adversary leads us to the judge, we will have to pay our debt in prison “up to the last penny” (Mt 5:26). It is a detail that sends us back to the parable of the big debtor whose debt the master remitted and who did not remit the few pennies that a companion of his ought to him (cf. Mt 18:23-35). But most of all it sends us back to that prayer of Jesus and, in Jesus, the supreme prayer which is the “Our Father”, in which Christ inserted and emphasized the theme of fraternal debts to be remitted as the Father remits us ours (cf. Mt 6:7-15).

It is as if Jesus told us that when our adversary is bringing us before the judge to make us pay our debt to the last penny, or when we are bringing our brother before the judge so that he pay to the last penny what he owes us, coming to an agreement, the reconciliation which must happen in our journey should consist in the common decision to cancel the debt, real or imaginary, that it between us. St. Paul will summarize this reconciliation marvelously when writing to the Romans: “Owe no one anything, except

to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Rom 13:8). And he reminds that the whole Law is brought together in the precept: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (cf. Rom 13:9; Lev 19:18). Which of us would not cancel all the debts that he has toward himself?!

To forgive debts implies agreeing to renounce what the brother already deprives me of, because what I loaned him I already lack. The dimension of “emptying” of the self, which in Greek is *kenosis*, that which the Son of God chose in becoming man and dying on the Cross (cf. Phil 2:6-11), is therefore indispensable for true reconciliation. To be reconciled to each other, our freedom must agree to lose that which our brother or sister owes us, and therefore to “empty ourselves” of that to which we have a right. This self-emptying is gratuitous, goes beyond mere justice, is mercy.

How is this possible? How can we make this choice to forgive our brother’s debt? Or how can we demand this choice of the brother to whom we are indebted? How is it possible to choose to lose something, to empty ourselves of something, to diminish? How can we ask this of our brothers and sisters in conflict among themselves or with us?

In this it is important that we understand the true sense of humility in the Rule and in the charism of St. Benedict. But most of all that we understand the humility of Christ himself, because it is to this that St. Benedict wants to form us so that we live fully, and together, the paschal mystery.

We have seen that in the passage of Matthew that we have considered the two terms used to define reconciliation, *dialasso* and *eunoio*, imply an exchange, a dialogue, to reach the communion of thoughts, of sentiments. Now, St. Paul introduces the hymn of Philippians 2 with these words: “If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.” (Phil 2:1-4)

And right away Paul puts all this together in asking us to open ourselves to that which this conversion of our hearts, feelings, and thoughts truly allows: “Have in yourselves the same sentiments of Christ Jesus” (2:5).

We cannot be reconciled only among ourselves, changing *our* feelings and our brother’s feelings. We need sentiments that surpass us, that surpass our measure, our being closed up on ourselves. We need the sentiments of Christ, literally: to “think in ourselves as in Christ Jesus”. And right afterward Paul reveals to us that Jesus did not want to fill himself up not even of himself, of his equality with God, but preferred to empty himself and obey even up to death on a Cross (cf. Phil 2:6-8).

If Paul asks this of us, it is because this grace is offered to us and we can accept it. We can have in us and among us the sentiments of Christ, that is, his charity.

Too often we seek to be reconciled and to live fraternal communion as if the issue were building and producing something that comes only from ourselves. As if Christian communion were a pact, a contract, a bilateral agreement between us. Nothing is bilateral in the Church, because we are called in everything to let come and act among us a Third, who is God, who is Christ, who is the Holy Spirit. In the parable of Luke 15, it is the father, and the mercy of the father, which can create reconciliation between the two brothers.

For this reason there is no true reconciliation among us if we do not listen to and accept the presence of God in our midst. And God gives us the Holy Spirit precisely for this. God shares with us the trinitarian Communion to enable us to be one single thing as the Father and the Son are united (cf. Jn 17).

This means that a deep reconciliation, a true communion, is not improvised in our communities. It takes a path walked together, which we superiors must encourage with all our effort, a path of listening to the Word of God, of prayer for each other and together, and a dialogue intended to recognize the Lord present among us and who speaks to us, and who passes on to us, as to the disciples of Emmaus, the sentiments of his humble and ardent charity.

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Mt 11:28-30)

The labor that we must perform in community is this experiencing together, in listening, in prayer, in fraternal life, how much Christ restores our lives. That is, to experience together Christ who quenches our thirst, who nourishes us, who consoles us. It is on the basis of this experience that it becomes possible to renounce the false fulnesses that create false debts and false credit among us. When we help each other perceive the fulness that God is for us, even if we are lacking or deprived of everything, then indeed the only debt we have to each other is the debt of charity, of “mutual love” (Rom 13:8). Charity is the only reality that fills us up the more it empties us. For the nature of charity is the gift of self. The more love is given the more we possess love. It is the mystery of God, of the Trinity, and the mystery of divine Mercy.

Christian reconciliation, then, is not merely the passing concern for a problem, the solution of “just one of those things”, but the essential and lasting experience of the mystery of God who has come to engage our life.